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Ministry of Education

QUESNEL OPENS STRONGSTART EARLY LEARNING CENTRE

QUESNEL – Minister of State for Childcare Linda Reid joined Quesnel school board chair Caroline Nielsen, district staff and parents today for the official opening of the Province's StrongStart early learning centre at Riverview elementary.

"Our government is partnering with the school district and the community to make this StrongStart centre a reality because we know that everyone benefits when communities and schools work together to help preschool children succeed," said Reid. "This centre will help parents support their preschoolers, providing them with every opportunity to enter the school system ready for success."

The centre takes advantage of underutilized space in Riverview elementary school. Many schools across B.C. have excess space as a result of declining enrolment.

Since 2001, enrolment has decreased by an estimated 50,000 students provincewide. Like the School Community Connections program that provides community access to existing underutilized school space, StrongStart centres turn the challenge of declining enrolment into an opportunity.

"Nearly one out of four B.C. kindergarten students is not developmentally ready to start school. We need to address that," said Education Minister Shirley Bond. "StrongStart early learning centres are located in schools with underutilized space and are part of our plan to improve literacy skills so that B.C. children have the best possible chance of success in school and in life."

The StrongStart centre offers a free drop-in program for parents or caregivers and their children. A qualified early childhood educator will lead activities, including stories, music, and art, to help children grow linguistically, physically and socially, and become comfortable in a school-like setting.

"The Quesnel school board believes the StrongStart program is a valuable enhancement to our district initiatives around early learning, literacy and parental involvement," said Cynthia Bernier, director of instruction for Quesnel school district. "Children who experience an intellectually stimulating environment as preschoolers are often better prepared and experience more success when they enter the public school system."

The Quesnel StrongStart Centre was awarded $50,000 to prepare its in-school space and fund the first year of operating costs, including staff, supplies and healthy snacks. The centre is receiving another $30,000 for its second year of operation.

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The StrongStart centre in Riverview elementary school is part of the first phase of the StrongStart centre program, which includes 16 sites and a government investment of over $1.4 million. In January, Premier Gordon Campbell unveiled the first phase of ReadNow BC, government's new literacy plan, which promised up to 80 StrongStart centres around the province and increased government's investment to $5 million.

StrongStart centres fulfil election platform and throne speech commitments to use underutilized school spaces as centres to deliver early learning services.

The Province is committed to reaching its goal of making B.C. the best-educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent. Since 2001, government has invested over $106 million in new literacy initiatives, including pre-literacy and early learning programs such as $9.5 million to operate the kindergarten readiness program Ready, Set, Learn and $2.7-million for the ActNow Literacy Education Activity and Play (LEAP BC) program that encourages literacy, physical activity and healthy eating in preschool-aged children.

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